THINKING OF HAVING SURGERY?

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Think about getting a second opinion.

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Ask your doctor or call toll-free

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Every day we make decisions. Some are easy, like what to wear to work. Some are harder, like whether to buy a house. When you must make a difficult decision, it helps to know as much as possible about the pros and cons.

The same is true when a doctor advises you to have non-emergency surgery. There are risks with any surgery and you should know what these are. You should also know what the surgery will do and whether other medical treatment might be used instead of surgery.

When thinking about non-emergency surgery, one way you can help yourself to reach a decision is to seek the advice of another qualified doctor. This advice is called a second opinion.

There are differences of opinion about medical problems. One doctor may recommend surgery; another may tell you to wait a while; another may suggest another kind of treatment. When you ask the right questions, receive thorough information, and have the opinions of two doctors, you increase your chances of making the decision that is right for you.

A second opinion *should not* be used to delay or avoid having an emergency operation. When there is time, a second opinion should give you additional information to help you decide if surgery is the best thing for you. You have every right to that information.

[illegible]

Before agreeing to any non-emergency surgery, you should know the answers to these questions.

1. What does the doctor say is the matter with you?
2. What is the operation the doctor plans to do?
3. What are the likely benefits to you of the operation?
4. What are risks of the surgery and how likely are they to occur?
5. How long would the recovery period be and what is involved?
6. What are the costs of the operation? Will your insurance cover all of those costs?
7. What will happen if you don't have the operation?
8. Are there other ways to treat your condition that could be tried first?

Ask these and any other questions you might have. The more you know, the better prepared you'll be to make a decision about surgery.

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Sometimes surgery is done on an emergency basis. It must be done right away, or within a few days, as in the case of acute appendicitis or injuries from an accident. *Because any delay could be life-threatening, second opinions are seldom possible for this kind of surgery.*

But much surgery is not an emergency. You have the time to choose when you want to have it, and even if you will have it. Some operations that are *usually* not emergencies are tonsillectomies, gall bladder operations, hysterectomies, hernia repairs and some cataract operations.

Anytime a doctor suggests non-emergency surgery, you should consider getting a second opinion.

- Make sure that a short delay will not be harmful.
- Make sure you have as much information as possible about the benefits and risks of the surgery.
- Find out if there are any other methods of treatment that you and your doctor can try first.
- Weigh the benefits and risks of having the operation against the benefits and risks of *not* having it.

Getting a second opinion is standard medical practice. Most doctors want their patients to be as informed as possible about their condition.

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If your doctor recommends non-emergency surgery, there are several ways to find a surgeon or another specialist in the treatment of your medical problem:

1. Ask your doctor to give you the name of another doctor to see. Do not hesitate to ask; most physicians will encourage you to seek the second opinion.
2. If you would rather find another doctor on your own:
   - You can contact your local medical society or medical schools in your area for the names of doctors who specialize in the field in which your illness falls.
   - You can call the government's toll-free number, (800) 638-6833, in

Maryland, call (800) 492-6603, to find out how to locate a specialist near you.

- If you're covered by Medicare, you can call your local Social Security Office (listed in your telephone directory under U.S. Government, Department Of Health, Education, and Welfare).
- If you're eligible for Medicaid, you can call your local welfare office.

How To Get A Second Opinion

Some people do not feel comfortable letting their doctor know that they are getting a second opinion. However, if you tell your doctor, you can ask that your records be sent to the second doctor. In this way, you may be able to avoid the time, costs and discomfort of having to repeat tests that have already been done.

When getting a second opinion, you should tell the second doctor:

- the name of the surgical procedure recommended, and
- any tests you know you have had

If the second doctor agrees that surgery is the best way to treat your problems, he or she will usually send you back to the first doctor to do the surgery.

If the second doctor disagrees with the first, most people find that they have the facts they need to make their own decision. If you are confused by different opinions, you may wish to go back to the first doctor to further discuss your case. Or you may wish to talk to a third physician.

How To Pay For The Second Opinion

Many private insurance companies pay for second opinions. You can contact your health insurance representatives for details.

Medicare will pay for the second opinion at the same rate it pays for other services. Most state Medicaid programs will also pay for second opinions.

Key Points To Remember About Second Opinions

- You can get a second opinion whenever non-emergency surgery is recommended. Most doctors approve of patients getting a second opinion and will assist you in doing so.
- Second opinions are a way for you to get additional expert advice from another doctor who knows a lot about treating medical problems like yours.
- Second opinions can reassure you—and your doctor—that the decision to have the surgery is the correct one.
- Second opinions are your right as a patient. They can help you make a better, informed decision about surgery.

The final decision regarding non-emergency surgery is up to you. After all, it's your body. Isn't your body worth a second opinion?

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